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HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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THE TEMPORAL ADVANTAGES OF RELIGION.

“For bodily exercise profiteth little; but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”
—1 Tim. iv. 8.

In the margin, the reading is, “Bodily exercise profiteth but for a little time; but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

By *godliness* is understood, substantially, that which we mean by *religion*. It is that life which is prescribed for men by God. It is declared that a religious or godly life carries with it the best of this world, as well as of the world that is to come. It is profitable in “all things.” And in a time when a great many believe that religion is outworn; when men think it is a system of empty and dry mysteries; when they revile it as a concatenation of dogmas or metaphysical abstractions; when they see so much of disputation and so much of ill-feeling among religious people; when they see sects warring against sects; when, looking back upon the history of the Church, of embodied religion, they see what conflicts it has produced in the world; when they enter into the discussions that prevail upon the minute points, the ten thousand nothings, around which men with busy zeal buzz and burn; when they behold how much weakness is bred by sentiment turned into sentimentality; when they hear so many things advanced which are offensive to just reason, and subversive of it,—in such a time, it is not surprising that multitudes turn away without taking the trouble to discriminate. If you associate religion with any of its ordinary exponents; if your idea of it springs chiefly from the outward forms of churches, or from the conduct of imperfect, fallible men; if you look simply on its weaknesses, or on its incidental developments in

time, you will scarcely feel any movement toward faith, or any ardent desire to apprehend or embrace a religious life.

I will confess that there is much in the religious lives of men which is not attractive; that there are many persons called religious who are far from being truly religious; and that many who are truly religious do not know how to make religion beautiful. Frequently it is unpolished; it is rude; it is hard; it is a yoke that is not easy; it is a burden that is not light.

I propose, in the few remarks that I shall make this evening, to look at a religious life, not from a sectarian standpoint, or from doctrinal standards, but in its larger relations, and show that it is proper; that it is a thing to be desired by men both for this world and for the world that is to come.

The very first step in religion must needs have regard to our relation to a Superior Being. Every man who has a vivid conception of an overruling God fashions that conception himself. It is not possible that there should be impressed upon a man's mind, as with a stamp upon paper, a preconceived view of God. Whatever the parent teaches the child, the child is obliged to digest, fashioning it into some idea of its own. So that, while we are ourselves the work of God, it may be reverently said that God, as we think of him, is the work of our reason and of our imagination; that into that sacred name, into that circle which includes all wisdom and goodness, we put our highest conceptions of whatever is just, and true, and right, and beautiful, and to be desired. Every man forms the conception which he calls *God* out of his own best experiences or observations. And it may be said that the views of God which are held at any particular period represent the best ideals of the best men of that period.

Nor do I see how we can do better than this. Do you say, "This, after all, is fashioning an imperfect view"? But "who, by searching, can find out God"? How can finite minds know perfectly, understand correctly, things which transcend their sphere, being infinite? The limitations of the human condition are such that we cannot do otherwise, or better, than to form our own ideas of God in the way which I have described.

When men are in the primary stages of development, and are nearly animal, their gods are little more than gods of animal force. They are somewhat counsellors and governors; but mainly they are celestial despots. The gods of heathenism are generally passionable gods. But as society refines, its elements are transformed, and the conceptions of the divine nature are civilized. As society rises still higher, it has heroic elements; it has magnanimities in it; and

superlative justice begins to be known among men. Here and there is a mind of supreme stature. And from these suggestions in their fellows around about them, men rise to nobler and still nobler conceptions of the nature of God. And there is this to be said: that while, on the one side, we may suspect our very best conceptions of God to be much marred by limitations and misapprehensions, on the other side we have reason to believe that when we shall see him as he is, he will, in purity, in truth, in beauty, in desirableness, in all that is magnanimous and magnificent, be transcendently better than we think.

Now, it is not a thing to be despised, it is not a thing to be lightly set aside, or set aside philosophically—the hovering over the race of men, or over any individual man, from childhood to the end of life, the conception of an overruling God who represents the very best sides of the very best men. The most consummate ideal that men have ever known, or felt, or thought of, is the ideal of One who is supreme and sovereign, guiding nature, and in it providence, which is but another name for nature, specialized for certain social purposes.

Such a conception as this fills the future, and enlarges the horizon of existence. It gives value to trifles, and takes away from the ten thousand experiences of life that part of them which, under other circumstances, would be intolerable. It gives atmosphere, it gives perspective, it gives value to everything. I am speaking of it simply as an ideal conception of God, independent of the question of the direct inshining, the direct dynamic influence of the divine mind upon ours.

Next, in this line of thought, I mention religion as obedience to this God—an obedience that consists in conformity to all the laws of God by which we are surrounded, so far as they are known to us. He who obeys all God's known or knowable laws may be said to be a godly man.

There has been substituted for this,—and in disproportion, in excess,—the spirit of reverence, and of offering to God. But frequently and clearly in the Old Testament—and certainly abundantly in the New Testament—it is taught us that God does not so much desire flattery, or praise, or prayer, or sacrifices, or oblations, as he does justice, and mercy, and truth, and purity, and duty. And how often he repelled with indignation the old Jews who came to him with all obsequiousness! “I loathe your incense, and I despise your sacrifices,” he says. And Jesus says, “When thou bringest thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift, and go thy

way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." In other words, "Do not come fawning to me, while you refuse to fulfill the social duties that are near to you, and are known to you ; as if anything that you could give to me would please me. I am best pleased when I see you right-minded, when I see you doing justly, when I see you acting honorably. Go, perform your moral duty, and then, out of a heart that is consciously allied to me, love me, and give testimony of your love." To obey the known laws by which we are surrounded, recognizing the fact that these laws are but so many embodiments of the divine law, and that therefore they are expressions of God's thought and will and purpose—this is religiousness.

He that obeys all the laws that surround him is not a superstitious man—need not be—ought not to be. The laws of nature, which touch the soul ; the laws of society, in a secondary sense, so far as they are found by human experience to be indispensable,—are divine. All the laws of our condition are but so many representations of the mode in which God meant man to live, and to develop himself in life ; and a conscientious and trustful and hopeful and joyous obedience to all these laws is godliness.

I am better pleased to see my children act right than I am to hear them lavish epithets of tenderness upon me. "Oh, my beloved father!"—what is that to me from a boy that will not fulfill my wishes ? "Oh, my best beloved!"—what is that from a daughter that disobeys my commands, and substitutes self-will for obedience to those commands ? It is not he that says the most prayers ; it is not he that says, "Lord, Lord" : it is he that doeth the will of my Father that is accepted of God. And religion consists in doing the will of God. And that will is made known more plainly by the laws that surround us than by any other elements of life.

There is a view of this subject that is worthy of a moment's consideration. The school of Rousseau went back to what is called a state of nature, as to a state of simplicity and happiness, of liberty and moral perfection ; and taught that as men became entangled in the complexity of what are called the artificial conditions of society, they were more and more in bondage in consequence of the multiplication of laws and customs. Now, I aver that a man opens up, and is free, just in the proportion in which he obeys laws. A man who disobeys laws is like one who attempts to travel through a wilderness in which no paths have been cut ; but a man who follows laws—divine laws—natural laws—is like one who traverses a turnpike that has been opened up and prepared for him. His mind is no longer burdened, and his

eye is no longer weary, with seeking a way. The moment he strikes the road his movement is facilitated; he is relieved of anxiety and care, and he can give himself to other thoughts. He is assisted at every step. Obedience to law is the method by which our faculties are quick in their just action; and true obedience is true liberation. If, on the other hand, a man is hurt, hampered, cramped, it is because there is some law which he perpetually disobeys. No man knows what liberty is except the man who has found out the laws which belong to each faculty, and the several conditions in which they are to be exercised, and gives himself cheerfully and fully to them.

While in a community, in a household, or in a church, there may be laws imposed that are purely arbitrary, burdensome, and needless, and that may tax one's time and perplex one's attention, this cannot be true in respect to any divine—any great and real—laws. These never burden nor tax men. A man is required, it is true, to rouse himself up to learn them, and, it may be, to discipline himself to obey them; but just so soon as he begins to obey God's laws, that moment he begins to have more personality and more power. By losing his life, it is said, he shall save it. By giving up self, you gain self. By asking "Which is the way?" and walking therein, you walk with increased strength.

To know the laws of God, and to obey them, as expressions of the divine will, with cheerfulness, with filial love and trust—this is religiousness of the highest description; and in this lies all profit, all strength, all liberty, all happiness. No man is so happy as he who is fulfilling known laws.

Next, I may mention the benefit of self-denial—the very thing that men dread in religious life, and yet one of the best things in it. In his natural state, every man is a commonwealth in anarchy. We have been most richly endowed. Layer upon layer of faculties; all the powers that stand related to the physical globe; the lower range of sympathies; the appetites and passions, which are most beneficent if kept within due bounds; the super-incumbent affections; and those still higher developments, the moral sentiments, which take hold, finally, upon the spiritual world itself,—these many parts quarrel among themselves, unless they are taught and disciplined. And this has been the burden of both poets and moralists from the beginning: "That which my reason approves, my passions refuse. I perceive the good, but I pursue the evil. The flesh wars against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh."

Now, there must be, in some way, instituted in every man's mind a settlement, a compromise. There must be a gradation,

and a subordination, of some of the faculties. There must be a government set up in a man's soul which shall bring all the parts of his nature into harmonious relations. This is done by what is called *self-denial*. It is brought about by the ascendancy of a moralized reason. It is accomplished by the subjection of that which is essentially fleshly to that which is essentially spiritual. So that where a man denies himself, it is only his lower self that he denies, and he denies it for the sake of his higher self. It is the reason that claims authority, and the passions are denied that the reason may have its way. It is the conscience that demands to be heard; and whatever is rude, unjust, and selfish, is obliged to succumb that conscience may dominate. It is the sense of kindness that requires cruelty to vacate the throne, and no longer crave the suffering of its victims. Whatever in man is animal, selfish, proud, hard and unjust, must subordinate itself to that which is pure and true and equitable and godly.

This process by which a man's lower nature is perpetually brought into subjection to his higher nature is what is meant by *self-denial*, or *taking up the cross*. It is the principle of obedience established between the inferior and the superior, the superior having a right to dominate over the inferior. That is what is meant when you are commanded to begin a religious life, and take up the cross. It is not meant that you are to stand up in the church and make a confession of your faith, as if that were a cross. Doing this may be a cross under some circumstances; but the particular cross which a man takes up when he becomes a religious and Christian man, is that of bringing his worldly nature, his fleshly propensities, into subjection to his reason, his conscience, and his spiritual affections. It is an inward cross that he is to take up. He is to subordinate that which is inferior to that which is superior.

Now, "godliness is profitable" in this. Is it profitable to have your piano out of tune, so that there are no two notes in any of the octaves on the whole key-board that are at peace? Is it a hard thing to have that instrument brought into tune? If you hear its wailings it seems very hard, but it is not. Every single chord that is being screwed up and brought into unison with some central point or pitch, is working toward harmony, sweetness, and musicalness.

And is it not good that the soul should be tuned? that the sub-base, the base, the tenor, and all the higher ranges of notes should be brought into relations with each other, so that from the top to the bottom the whole shall be in harmony? And by what principle is this done? By the principle of subjection, by the principle of gra-

dation, as established by God in nature, as discovered by reason, and as abundantly illustrated in Scripture, which contains the sublimest reasoning in spiritual things that was ever known in this world.

When, therefore, I call men to a religious life, and say, "You must practice self-denial," I do not know that religion demands it more than anything else; but it demands it better. No man can live and not deny himself. A wicked man denies himself. A lazy man denies himself. A glutton denies himself. Everybody denies himself. The question is, whether it shall be done according to the principle that God lays down, by which you will have the liberty, the co-ordination, and the co-operation of every part of the mind; or whether it shall be done partially, and for low and really selfish purposes.

I argue the reasonableness of the Christian religion in nothing more than in the recognition of the necessity of obedience to law; the recognition of the importance of the gradation of the faculties of a man's soul; the recognition of the essential subordination of the lower parts of a man's nature to the higher parts. And it is this obedience, this gradation, this subordination that constitute self-denial in religious life.

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

When the bullock is first yoked up, the yoke is not easy, and it makes his neck sore, because he has not learned to wear it; but as soon as he has learned, it is easy. What colt in the wilderness is worth anything on whose back no saddle has rested, and whose skin no harness has ever touched? When is a steed in his glory? When he has been taught to use his capacities to the best advantage; when he has been broken in, in order that he may break out; when he has been subdued, in order that he may be mightier; when he is kept under, in order that he may lift himself infinitely superior to what he otherwise could have been.

No man is such a conqueror as the man who has defeated himself. No man is such a sovereign as the man who has put himself under.

You will not be surprised, then, when I say, having proceeded thus far, that a religious life is one which implies, or demands, the highest elements of reason. I do not say that the highest exercise of reason is compatible with the state at which religion finds men in the beginning; but I do say that a system of religion which is true to God and nature is one that unfolds the reason more and more;

that employs it, that appeals to it, that educates it. And among the different sects, the presumption is that those who unite the highest degree of purity and disinterestedness with the most eminent intellectual tendencies, are the most nearly orthodox—if God is orthodox. The reason is, as it were, God enthroned in the soul.

Not that reason is sufficient ; but reason is much misapprehended. Its nature, its method, its operation are not understood. If I sit and think abstractly and purely, confining myself simply to the process of thought, I come short of knowledge. Reason alone cannot teach my affection to reason. Magnetized and colored by affection, reason becomes intuitive, and is almost a certain teacher. No man, by the reason alone, can understand music ; but if the musical faculty be in the soul, and if it lend its color and influence to the reason, then the reason, acting in conjunction with the musical faculty, becomes a more perfect teacher. No man without conscience can spell out the truths of conscience by pure and simple reason ; but when the moral faculty is joined to the intellectual, then the intellectual, struck through by the colors of the moral, becomes a true and just interpreter.

Men are afraid of reason, and they say, “ Are we not in danger of running into error by relying upon our reason ? ” Yes, if you mean abstract reason, we may be in danger. Men say, “ Reason leads to science, and science to materiality, and materiality to annihilation, and annihilation to pantheism, and pantheism to atheism.” They say that we are to choose between reason and the individual and collective testimony of the Church ; and that if we choose reason, we go away from religion toward materiality, and ultimately toward atheism. But I aver, on the other hand, that a true reason, acting with the affections, is constantly tracing its deductions up through our relations in life, and bringing them to bear upon our experience in religious affairs. Reason is a permanent blessing of God to the soul. Without it, there can be no large religion. Without it, religion is very little better than a superstition. With it, religion grows deeper, broader, richer, more unailing. It emancipates man. It gives him the power of standing erect, no longer a crouching creature, no longer a worm ; but a son of God, a prince.

The opposition that is made between faith and reason, I disown. By *faith*, I understand simply the belief in things not visible to the senses. It is a supersensuous reason. It is the action of the mind on things that do not present themselves to the outward senses—on moral qualities. No man ever saw heroism ; but every man has seen persons acting under its inspiration. No man ever saw virtue ;

but every man knows there is such a thing. No man ever saw genius; but every man believes there are persons endowed with genius. There are various phenomena which cannot be seen, but whose effects are seen when they are set in operation. There are many truths which are recognized, though they are neither material nor tangible nor visible.

In its most comprehensive definition, then, *faith* is the sense of truths or things which do not present themselves to the outward mind. The apostle says,

“Faith is the evidence of things not seen.”

There you have it. Two thousand years before we were so witty or wise as to discover it, faith was declared to be “the evidence of things not seen.” Faith is a belief of things which are not recognized by a man’s eyes, ears, nose, mouth, or hand. In other words, moral qualities, spiritual existences, the higher realms of truth, we do not submit to the coarser analysis which belongs to materiality. And how men can say that faith is opposed to reason in such relations, I cannot understand. I have to use my reason for the sake of faith. No man can have faith who does not first have reason. If my priest says to me, “You must have faith so and so,” I must think about it, and think about it, before I can have faith. What I take by faith my reason must interpret. Reason is indispensable to faith.

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord.”

God, that made the eye, shall he not see? God, that made the ear, shall he not hear? And God that distinguished man by such enlargement of intelligence, the germs and glimpses of which we see in the brute creation; God, that more widely enlarged the door of man’s moral nature, and set reason to shining in the lighthouse on the sea of the passions, as a bright and morning star—shall he not accept reason? Does he fear it, or despise it? He encourages it. His commandments are so many appeals to reason. They are based upon it. Paul says,

“I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

It is reasonable.

It may be that our reason cannot master all the facts connected with a truth; but we shall understand them better and more fully than if we had no reason. We shall continually meet things which we cannot explain or understand; but the general truth in religious life is this, that he who has the largest use of reason may be the best religious man. That is, there is no interpreter like reason.

Reason tends to religiousness, and so to godliness, if it be rightly employed. It gives us right ideas, and keeps the great concave above full of hope and expectancy. It brings us into the liberty of obedience to great natural laws. It teaches us to subordinate our outward nature to our inward nature. It enfranchises the understanding, and brings daylight to the soul.

Under such circumstances, I need not say that if a man has learned, in following God, and his commands, and the light of reason, to control himself, and walk in divinely appointed paths, it is fair to expect that this religious and godly life will lead to worldly thrift—notwithstanding that there are, seemingly, so many expressions in the New Testament of the contrary sort. We are to remember that the weather which prevails when the winter is breaking up, when March rules, is not necessarily the weather which is to prevail through all the growing season. When the apostles were breaking away from the turmoils of Judaism, when persecution was let loose, when revolutions were making the whole earth quake, the facts which existed in respect to godliness and right-living were not such as were to characterize all the subsequent ages of the world. It was true then that men would often be obliged to accept poverty. It was true that men would often be obliged to forsake their homes. It was true that men would often be obliged to sacrifice domestic affections. And it is true that, in certain exigencies, men may be obliged to do these things now; but these things are not necessarily a part of religion. Patriotism may not be a part of religion. Where the Scriptures speak of the barrenness of life, and the sacrifices in life, they refer to local exigencies. There is no essential condition of godliness in large and continuous operations which tend to thrift. They may tend to a man's destruction as much as the exercise of belluine passions. And religion is a restraint on a man's passions and appetites, and so promotes his prosperity. Religion obliges a man to think forward, and guard his movements; and in this way tends to make him more thrifty. There is nothing more damaging to a man's prosperity in this world than an indiscreet greediness which inclines him to grasp after more things than he can manage, or to grasp after things faster than he can manage them. Religion says,

“Let your moderation be known unto all men.”

Restrain all your desires. Curb your passions and appetites. Practice self-government.

Where, in communities, you find the truest form of regulated religion, there you are most likely to find the largest amount of thrift. There is no class of persons known that are more eminent in

their obedience to natural laws than our friends the Quakers ; and it is the testimony of all the world that there is no class that are so thrifty as they. Meekness, gentleness, abstinence from the exercise of force one toward another ; the arbitration of everything according to the rules of right ; regulated industry ; frugality ; justice between man and man,—these are their daily instructions, and they accord with their usual conduct. The consequence is that their barns burst with fullness ; their presses overflow ; they have more than heart can wish ; and abundance is theirs, for generous sparing to those who lack.

Morality, then, tends to thrift—the higher forms of morality—especially that morality which takes on spirituality : so much so, that if a man is a large owner of real estate, and wants to sell his property, he says, “I don’t believe in the Bible ; I have no faith in what they call religion ; but churches bring the best people into a neighborhood.” Where a man is engaged in a real estate speculation, he likes to see a church go up. A shrewd worldly man, judging purely from selfish considerations, bears testimony that the men who cluster about churches are generally thrifty ; are generally fore-handed ; are generally enterprising. On the other hand, the men who spend their Sundays in grogshops ; the men who go roistering about the streets ; the men who sing coarse songs, and swear, and drink,—are those the men that real estate owners want when they are starting a new neighborhood ? They may like to go with these men ; they may join with them in railing against religion ; but after all, when you bring them to the test, they are not the class of men that they want, to give success to a real estate speculation. When it comes to the foundation of things, they want men that are self-governed ; men that are inspired by higher ideals than passion and appetite. They have a continual sense that the very men whom they call hypocrites, are men who, by reason of virtue, morality, or something of the sort, are thrifty, fore-handed, prosperous men.

“Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

I do not mean that every man is godly in proportion to his riches, nor do I mean that every man who is thrifty is therefore religious ; because we are living together in society, and the qualities of one man reflect themselves on another. A wise father and mother will rear seven or eight fools in a family, and they will come up very well. I do not mean absolute idiots, but simple-minded and unthrifty children. You often find that very ordinary children are carried respectably through life by the transmitted influence of their parents and their social surroundings. The godliness

that is embodied in households, institutions, laws and customs, holds up men that are personally and individually weak. It is imputed to them for righteousness. It passes over to them. And so a man may be prosperous, though he be worldly. He may rise by reason of the reflected influence of other men on him. But generally the proposition is true, that where you find the most religion there you will find the most worldly prosperity—in communities, I mean ; not in single persons. And you will find that communities which are regulated by moral influence, and in which animalism is put down by spirituality, are communities of enlightened reason, where the conscience is dominant, and seeks to conform itself to the laws of God.

I may mention one other consideration—namely, that in this life men, while they are perpetually achieving success, are far from being happy. There are men whose vineyards bear abundant clusters, but who do not know how to make wine out of them. Or, to drop the figure, men live in this world, and attain success in a great variety of directions, but do not know how to manufacture happiness out of it. How is it? What is the matter? Why are not men happy? What is it that distresses them? How large an element of care enters into common life! How large an element of discontent! How large an element of fear! How large an element of greediness! How dissatisfied men are because their success is not so large as they desire! How much envy and jealousy there are among them! One looks out of his palace, and sees other palaces going up that are finer than his, and that are owned by men who own more than he does; and though he has more than heart could wish, he loses the flavor of his own affairs because somebody has more property than he. And so, with unsatisfied ambition, with over-greediness, with complaining discontent, and with narrow selfishness, men are perpetually cutting themselves, as the old heathen did in their worship. So men, by care, by envy, by the malign passions, are taking away the flavor of true content from themselves. Men seldom have peace in this great discordant world. In the din and rush of human life you can seldom find peace.

In the battle of Gettysburg, while a thousand cannon shook the hills and the whole heaven quivered with reverberations, during a moment's pause, in a cemetery, a sparrow sang sweetly out from a beach-tree which was growing there. When the cannon again uplifted their voice, the sparrow was silent; but it sang at every pause. And what that sparrow's voice was amid the wild roar of war, that is peace in the discord, discontent and din of human life. A single

voice is now and then sweetly singing out of the midst of content ; but nowhere do you hear choirs of voices singing peace. There is no widespread expression of happiness heard. And there is no abiding peace.

What has left those marks on your brow ? It is anxiety ; it is fear ; it is ill-fated desire. These are the signatures on the human face. Suffering and anxious care are written there.

Now, it is the peculiar office of religion to teach us the overruling providence of God. Not that there is any special favoritism ; not that God undertakes to inject upon the regular economy which he has introduced into the world any special favors ; but that the whole economy of nature is under the control of God, and that God has the same power of using natural laws that man has.

By a wise knowledge of laws, and by a judicious following of them, I can make my house shine with joy ; I can make my winter hearth cheerful ; I can make my summer hall cool ; I can perfume my garden with flowers ; I can make my orchard hang lush with golden fruit ; I can make my farm yield abundant harvests ; I can bring up my children to industry ; I can make the difference between their being castaways and eminent citizens. By a wise knowledge and use of natural law I can change the fate of the village ; I can change the destiny of states ; I can change the facts of the time. That which distinguishes man from the brute is his power, in dealing with nature, to milk her laws, and make them give forth their bounty.

And shall not God know how to do it ? Shall I have that eminent power, and shall God be without it ? When I preach the providence of God, I preach a providence, not that sets aside natural law, but that employs those processes which are consistent with natural law. I learn to use natural laws from my God, and he can use them better than I can. There is an overruling providence, such that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father's notice. All the things that have to do with the family of man are noted by God ; not alone the things which relate to the Church, but the things which relate to the poor Hottentot, and the Caffre, and the wandering Indian of the pampas. There is not a creature that has the seed of immortality in him, that God does not see and care for. We cannot understand a Being who is large enough to be competent to such vast detail ; but the idea of such a Being is only an extension of that which we know, in small, to be the complex power with which intelligent men comprehend the affairs of life, and which is a sufficient hint to enable us to form some conception of the possibility of a Being who can carry the whole world in his thought

easily and naturally, and so control natural laws that men may trust him and rest on him.

“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.” “Cast thy burden on the Lord.” “Take no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.”

So the great fertile cause of discontent may be removed, by a childlike faith in God, who is sovereign in his providence, and who cares for all mankind.

The time would fail me to enter at large upon the other points which I have marked for the evening's discussion; but I will speak of one other single element, and that is the light which true godliness throws upon declining years, and upon the great fact of transition which men call death. There is nothing more feared, and nothing that should be less feared, than this. If death be the coming of the Son of Man (and as such it is steadily and beautifully spoken of in the New Testament); if it is but falling asleep in Jesus; if it is the harvest hour when men are gathered, as the Old Testament expresses it, “like a shock of corn” fully ripe; if it be the taking of men to their fathers,—if this be death, need we look farther than that to find that it is emancipation; to find that it is to us like the casting off of the bark of a tree? If dying is to us what the breaking of the shell is to the bird, or what the swelling of the kernel is to the seed; if dying is planting here that we may live there, in a higher state—then may it please God to call us home. If dying is a breaking of the bonds which constrain us in this life; if it be release; if it be larger liberty; if it be more glorious aspiration; if it be faith—and it is—is it not worth our while to have that belief? The fears of death that goad men; those absurd terrors which have, by ignorant hands, been thrown around about the final home; those gorgon, hideous phantasms with which the closing scenes of life have been invested,—how are all these driven away, as fog, and mist, and smoke, and dust, by the outshining of the God of love! Dying? What says the hymn concerning it?

“Shall aught beguile us on the road,
When we are walking back to God?
For strangers into life we come,
And dying is but going home.”

How blessed is living to those who are not afraid to die? How blessed is dying to those who are tired of living—yea, and if they be not tired! Out of a charmed group of children; out of the harvest-field of purposes ripening for the sickle; out of the myriad endearments of life, if one have but an enfranchised eye and a cleansed imagination, how glorious it is to step from joy to joy, and from glory to glory

This is the religion to which I call you. I preach no superstition. I appeal to no base passions, and to no unmanly fear—though fear is not always unmanly. I preach to you God, transcendently the noblest and best. I preach to you the commandments of God, which are just and true. I preach to you a religion of self-restraint and of self-control. I preach to you a religion of obedience. I preach to you a religion of hope, of love, of trust, and of victory—victory first over life, then over self, and then over death, with which comes the crown of immortality.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

WE implore thy benediction, our Father. We do not draw near to solicit as from one who is unwilling; nor do we bring to thee the tidings of unexpected trouble. Before we knew ourselves, our rising wants were ever provided for. Thine ordinance is in nature. The sun is thy messenger. The year speeds its rounds of mercy in obedience to thy commands; and in the air, in the sea, upon the land, and in all the places of thy dominion, thou hast appointed those laws and those economies which are filled with treasure; so that every sense is met, and every faculty is blessed from day to day. Our growing wants find an ever-ready treasury. The whole earth is filled with thy goodness. Why, then, should we implore thy benediction? We are surrounded by mercies more than we recognize. Yea, by thy gifts often thou art thyself hidden. We beseech of thee that we may understand more and more the mystery of the goodness of God; the endless munificence of him who is offended by our transgression and takes no offense; who is wounded by our unbelief, and yet is forever healing us of unbelief. We bless thee that thou hast made it our privilege, as well as our duty, to draw near in prayer, and take the things which are already proffered. So in asking, our souls are doubly blessed. So everything received in prayer becomes a gift of God to us. So the light of thy countenance, the joy of thy heart, is imparted even to the commonest things of life.

And now, Lord, we thank thee for all the way in which we have been led through the years that are gone by. We thank thee for all the mercies which we have seen following the labors we have been permitted to participate in. We thank thee for all the grace which has been made manifest toward us; for the succor which has been vouchsafed to us in times of distress; for strength in times of weakness; for listening to our petitions when all other cries came back to us fruitless and in vain.

We rejoice, O Lord our God, that thou hast been constant; that though invisible, thou hast always been present; that though without voice, thou hast forever been speaking to us. We rejoice in the experience of thy love and goodness; and we desire, by the mercies of God, and by the memory of all his loving-kindness, now to consecrate ourselves to his service, which is reasonable. We desire to yield up soul and body to thee, in obedience to thy laws, in the furtherance of thy good pleasure. And we pray that we may be enlightened more perfectly, day by day, and know the way of righteousness, and walk therein more firmly, and bring forth more abundantly those fruits of the soul in which thou art well pleased.

We pray that thou wilt grant to all who are present to-night a sense of the divine presence. May there be that in the heart of every one which

shall make him understand that God is with him. May every one feel that he is known by name, and by disposition, and in all his circumstances, by the blessed Saviour. We pray that every one may be able to venture upon Christ. May every one hear his call, and come to him, and take his burden and his yoke, and realize the truth of all his promises. We pray, O Lord, that thou wilt grant thy blessing to rest upon all who are in trouble; all who are vexed with sore distress; all who are weighed down with goading cares; all who are prostrated by disappointments; all who are mourning in deep bereavement; all who are suffering from fear or remorse or guilty mistakes.

We beseech of thee, O Lord, that thou wilt be a Savior to every soul. Deliver each one from his own special trial. Manifest thyself to each as his God and Saviour.

We beseech of thee that it may not be in vain that we put our trust in thee. May we grow strong by confidence from day to day, as we realize the constancy of thy character since thou dost verify every word of thy promise as it stands before us, yea and amen. Grant that our trust in God may work in us more and more trust in days to come. May we learn by experience, at last. May we walk no longer by sight. May we henceforth walk by faith.

We pray, O God, that thou wilt grant thy blessing to rest upon all the families that are represented here. According to their several circumstances bless them abundantly by thy Spirit and by thy providence. Remember all that are away from us. Cherish them, and defend them, and bring them back again, if that be thy righteous will. And grant, we pray thee, that all those that are upon the sea, and all those who are in distant lands, and all those who are scattered every whither, may come up in remembrance before thee, as our hearts remember them.

And we pray for thy blessing to rest upon thy people of every name; upon all thy churches and ministering servants. Spread abroad the truth and knowledge of God as it is in Christ Jesus. And we pray that thy kingdom may come, and that all the evils which are thwarting the advance of righteousness may be taken out of the way. May light take the place of darkness, and knowledge supplant ignorance, and true faith drive superstition forth from the world. Let the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; and may he reign from the rising of the sun till the going down of the same.

And to thy name shall be the praise, forever and ever. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Father, we beseech of thee that thou wilt let the light of thy truth shine more and more clearly. Cleanse us of all our misinterpretations, and may the words of the prophets, the words of the holy men of old, come down to us, that we may read them, in our own tongue, verified by our own experience, enlarged and enlightened by the inshining of the Holy Spirit. Grant that we may have such communion with thee that the light of our understanding shall be the light of thine. May we think in thee. May we live in thee. May we rejoice in thee.

Bless us, we beseech of thee, as we go hence to our duties during the week. Fortify us against every fear. Strengthen us in things good. Enlarge our views and lead us to thee. Grant us thine own unspeakable mercies, according to the goodness that is in thee, and not according to the goodness that is in us. And finally, give us the rewards of the heavenly estate. And to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit shall be praise everlasting. *Amen.*

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